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STAR TREK THE NEXT GENERATION® / DOCTOR WHO

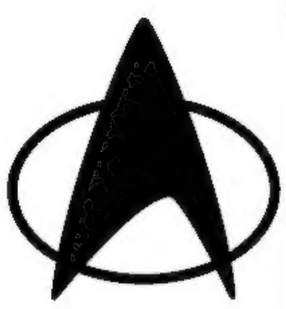
ASSIMILATION²

The story so far...

The Doctor is an alien, the last of the powerful Time Lords. He is an intrepid traveller through time and space, armed only with his incredible intelligence and his fix-anything sonic screwdriver. He travels alone, except for the human companions he befriends, briefly sharing his life with them and showing them the astonishing wonders of the universe.

Space... the Final Frontier. These are the voyages of the *Starship Enterprise*. Its continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go were no one has gone before.

Even as the Cybermen made their way toward the Borg homeworld after turning on their allies, Captain Jean-Luc Picard refused to listen to the imperiled Borg, much to the Doctor's dismay. Guinan revealed Picard's troubled history with the Borg to the Doctor, who in turn showed Picard the grim future that waits if he does not intervene. Now Captain Picard has agreed to do something that goes against his better judgment...



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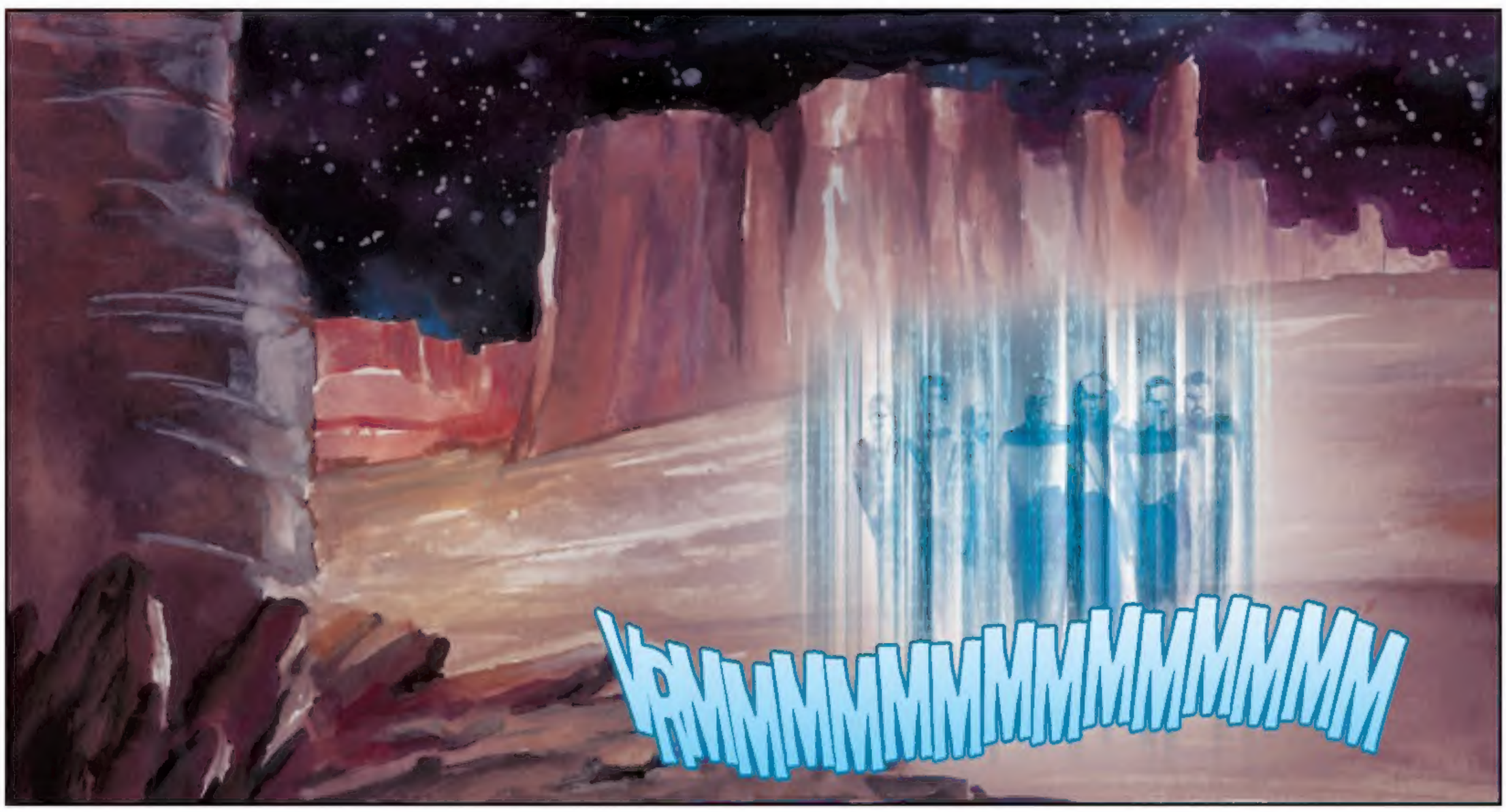
PLANETOID TAU LEE. A DESOLATE ROCK IN SPACE.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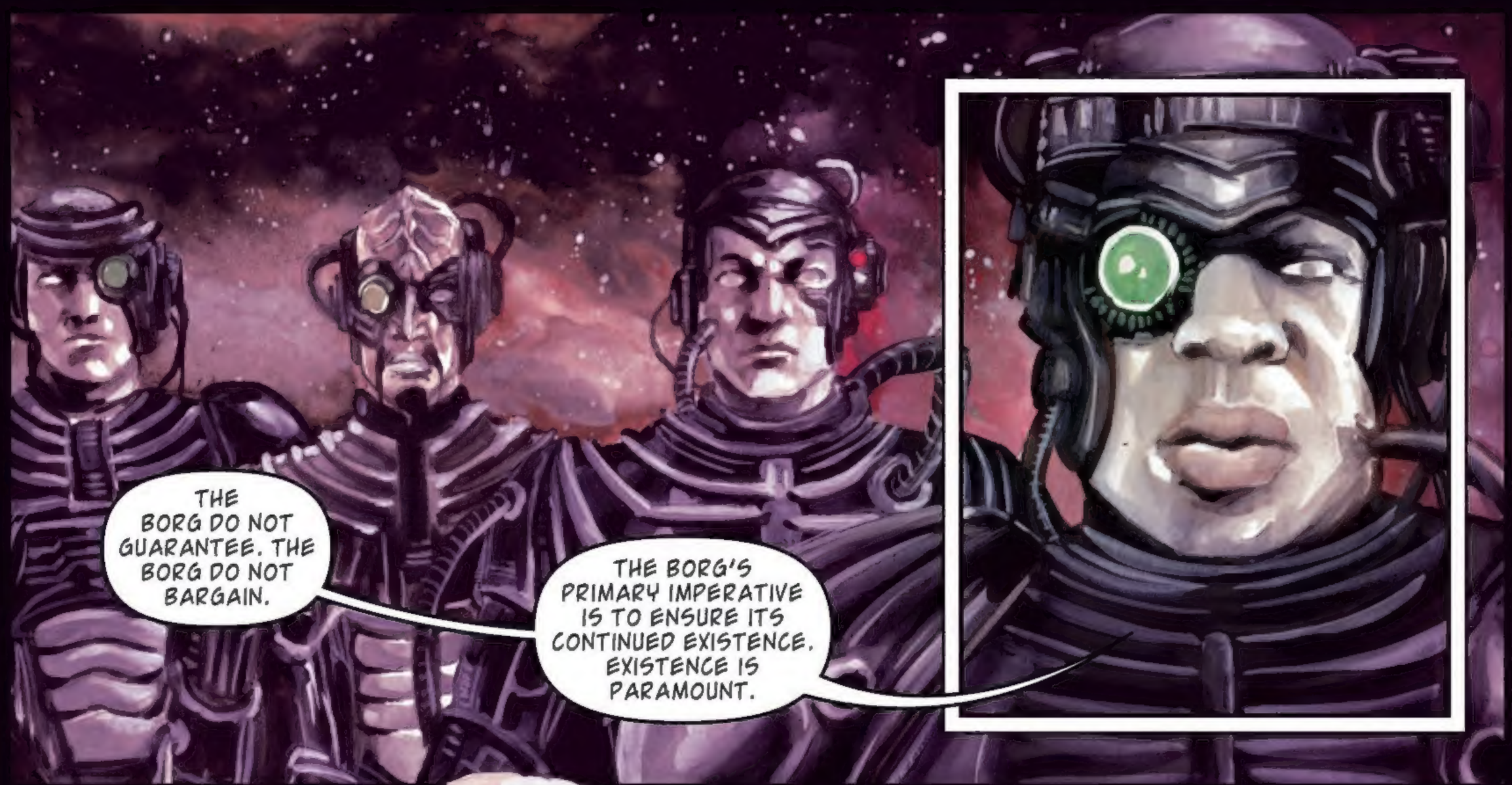
WOW. I'M NEVER GOING TO GET USED TO THAT.
MISTER DATA, REPORT!
NO SIGN OF THEM YET, SIR.

SO, WAIT, THERE'S NO ONE HERE?
THAT'S WEIRD.
THEY'LL COME. DECEPTION ISN'T REALLY IN THEIR NATURE.
WAS THIS REALLY NECESSARY, CAPTAIN? THE BORG WANT TO COOPERATE—
THERE IS SUCH A THING AS AN ACCEPTABLE RISK, DOCTOR, AND ALLOWING A FULL BORG LANDING PARTY ABOARD THE ENTERPRISE DOES NOT FALL UNDER THAT CATEGORY.
I HAVE THEM NOW, CAPTAIN. A BORG CUBE HAS JUST ENTERED STANDARD ORBIT, IN OPPOSITE POSITION FROM THE ENTERPRISE, AS INSTRUCTED.
THERE THEY ARE!

PHASERS SET FOR MAXIMUM AND AUTOMATIC PHASE RECALIBRATION, CAPTAIN.
CAPTAIN!
WE WILL NOT ENTER INTO THIS UNPREPARED, DOCTOR.

LOCUTUS OF BORG. WE HAVE ARRIVED AS INSTRUCTED.
AND WE'VE COME AS YOU ASKED. WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE?

I AM THE CONDUIT. I HAVE BEEN DESIGNATED TO SPEAK FOR THE COLLECTIVE AND SERVE AS THE LIAISON TO LOCUTUS DURING THESE NEGOTIATIONS.
THE BORG COLLECTIVE IS AT RISK OF FALLING ENTIRELY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE CYBERMEN. THIS CANNOT BE ALLOWED. SURVIVAL OF THE COLLECTIVE IS PARAMOUNT. YOU WILL ASSIST US IN ERADICATING THE CYBERMEN.
"ERADICATE"? DON'T YOU MEAN "ASSIMILATE"?
ASSIMILATION OF THE CYBERMEN WAS ATTEMPTED. IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE. ERADICATION IS REQUIRED.
AND WHY PRECISELY SHOULD WE GET INVOLVED IN THIS?
WITHOUT YOUR INTERVENTION, THE CYBERMEN WILL COMPLETELY SUBSUME THE COLLECTIVE. SHOULD THE CYBERMEN GAIN THE FULL RESOURCES OF THE COLLECTIVE, YOUR DESTRUCTION AT THEIR HANDS IS A CERTAINTY. DO YOU NOT CONSIDER YOUR SURVIVAL ESSENTIAL?
INDEED. AND WHAT GUARANTEE DO WE HAVE THAT YOU WON'T TURN ON US AT THE FIRST AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITY?


THE BORG DO NOT GUARANTEE. THE BORG DO NOT BARGAIN.
THE BORG'S PRIMARY IMPERATIVE IS TO ENSURE ITS CONTINUED EXISTENCE. EXISTENCE IS PARAMOUNT.

SINCE YOUR CONTINUED EXISTENCE MAY SAFEGUARD OURS, NO HARM SHALL COME TO YOU.

MUTUAL BENEFIT, CAPTAIN. OUR SURVIVAL IS THEIR SURVIVAL.
AGREED. HOW SHALL WE PROCEED?

I WILL ACCOMPANY YOU TO PROVIDE ALL DATA NECESSARY TO ERADICATE THE CYBERMEN, AND TO PROVIDE CONTINUED COMMUNICATION WITH THE COLLECTIVE.
UNACCEPTABLE! CAPTAIN, EVEN A SINGLE BORG DRONE ABOARD THE ENTERPRISE CONSTITUTES TOO GREAT A RISK!
ALL COMPONENTS REQUIRED FOR ASSIMILATION ARE BEING REMOVED FROM MY SYSTEMS. THE RISK OF ASSIMILATION FROM MY PRESENCE WILL BE NIL.
DO YOU FIND THIS ACCEPTABLE?
MISTER DATA?

CONFIRMED, CAPTAIN. ALL THE SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY NECESSARY TO BEGIN THE ASSIMILATION PROCESS ARE NO LONGER PRESENT.
VERY WELL, THEN.

OH, DEAR GOD.

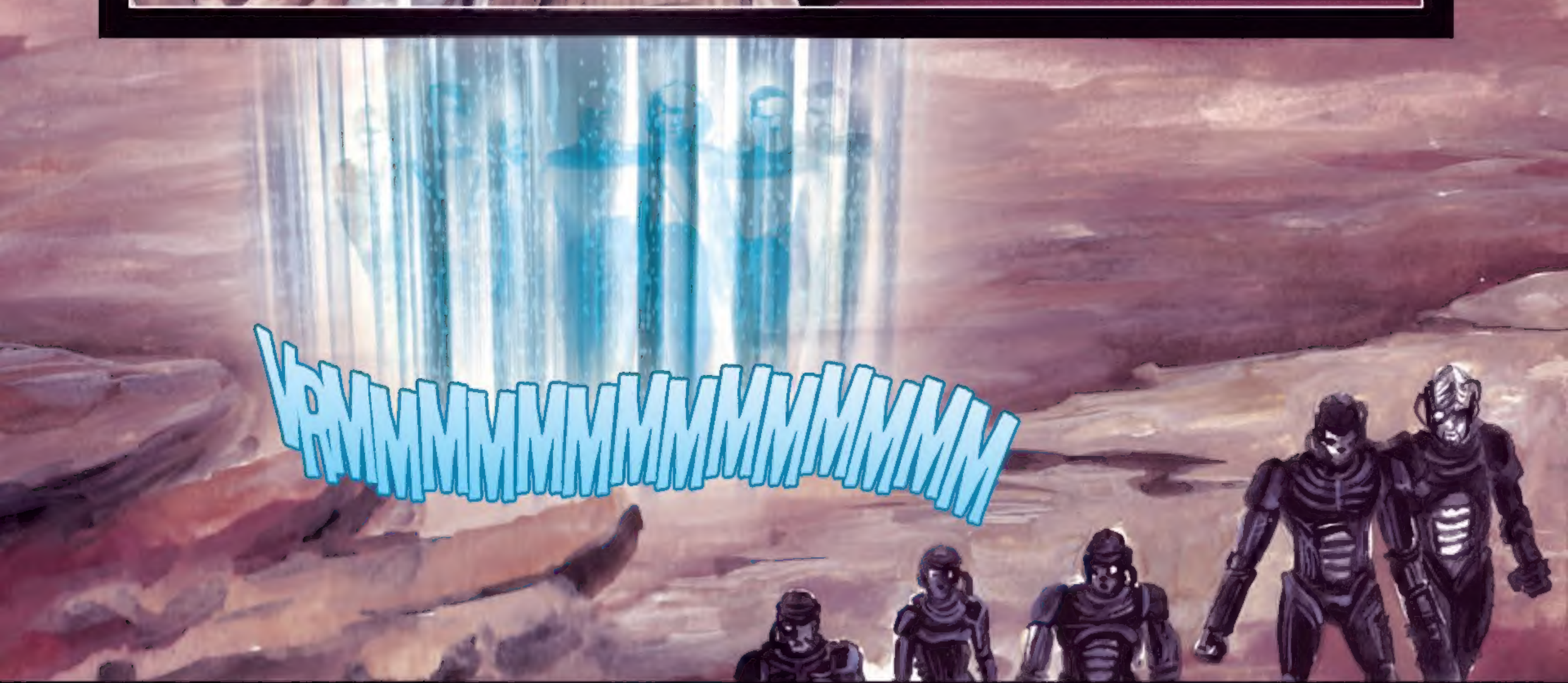
BERTRAND? BERTRAND, IT'S YOU!

YOU MURDERERS!

IT'S MARCUS BERTRAND, CAPTAIN OF THE *POTEMKIN*! THAT MAN WAS MY FRIEND! YOU HAD TO RUB OUR NOSES IN IT, DIDN'T YOU?
COME, COMMANDER. THIS WON'T SOLVE ANYTHING.

BERTRAND WAS ASSIMILATED WHEN HIS SHIP WAS TAKEN AT DELTA IV. IT WAS BELIEVED THAT UTILIZING ONE YOU WERE FAMILIAR WITH WOULD MORE EASILY FACILITATE OUR PARTNERSHIP. ARE YOU READY TO DEPART?

YES. LET US.
PICARD TO *ENTERPRISE*. EIGHT TO BEAM UP.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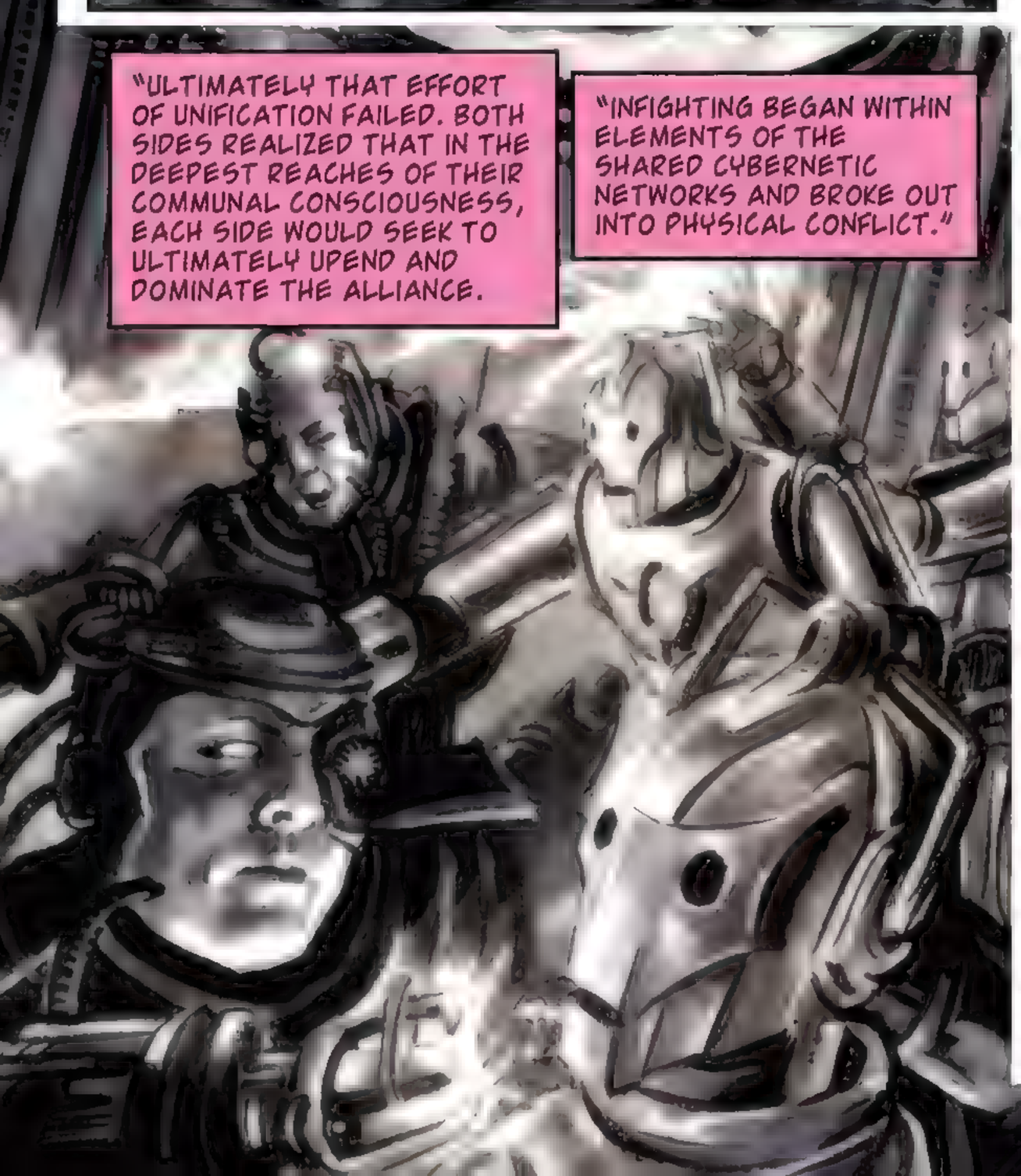
WE NEED TO MEET IMMEDIATELY TO COORDINATE A PLAN OF ACTION.
AGREED. WORF, LET US TAKE THIS TO THE BRIEFING ROOM—
MEETING ROOMS ARE IRRELEVANT. INFORMATION CAN BE CONVEYED AND EXCHANGED ANYWHERE.

VERY WELL, THEN. SOME ANSWERS FIRST. WHAT PRECISELY HAPPENED TO THE BORG-CYBERMEN ALLIANCE?
WHEN THE BORG WERE FIRST CONTACTED BY THE CYBERMEN, THE COLLECTIVE WAS INTRIGUED.

THE CYBERMEN HAD MADE GREAT EFFORTS TO CROSS DIMENSIONAL SPACE TO PROPOSE THE ALLIANCE, IMPRESSING THE COLLECTIVE WITH THEIR TECHNOLOGY AND THEIR DEDICATION.
BOTH SIDES RECOGNIZED IN EACH OTHER COMMON PRINCIPLES AND METHODS. NEGOTIATIONS WERE ULTIMATELY SUCCESSFUL. THE COMBINED FLEET THAT RECENTLY INVADED FEDERATION SPACE WAS OUR FIRST JOINT EFFORT.

WHAT WENT WRONG?
THE FIRST EFFORTS TO MERGE BORG AND CYBERMAN CULTURES WERE INITIALLY SUCCESSFUL. BOTH SIDES, WE THOUGHT, WERE INTERESTED IN A MUTUAL ASSIMILATION OF THE STRENGTHS OF THE OTHER, CREATING A NEW COLLECTIVE OF A HIGHER POWER.


"ULTIMATELY THAT EFFORT OF UNIFICATION FAILED. BOTH SIDES REALIZED THAT IN THE DEEPEST REACHES OF THEIR COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS, EACH SIDE WOULD SEEK TO ULTIMATELY UPEND AND DOMINATE THE ALLIANCE.
"INFIGHTING BEGAN WITHIN ELEMENTS OF THE SHARED CYBERNETIC NETWORKS AND BROKE OUT INTO PHYSICAL CONFLICT."

THE TRIGGER FOR THE FINAL BETRAYAL OF THE BORG COLLECTIVE BY THE CYBERMEN WAS THE DETECTION OF A TIME LORD. YOU—YOU ARE THE DOCTOR, THE TIME LORD.
ME? WHAT DID I HAVE TO DO WITH THIS?

"AS OUR FLEET CHASED THE *ENTERPRISE* INTO THE NEBULA, THE CYBERMEN DETECTED ON BOARD THIS SHIP THE TIME LORD AND HIS VEHICLE.

"THE CYBERMEN WERE VERY CONCERNED THAT THE PRESENCE OF THE TIME LORD IN THIS UNIVERSE WOULD INTRODUCE A RANDOM, POWERFUL ELEMENT THAT COULD DISRUPT THEIR PLANS FOR DOMINION.

"JUST AS TENSIONS WITHIN THE ALLIANCE WERE REACHING A CLIMAX, THE CYBERMEN FOUND A WEAKNESS IN THE BORG COLLECTIVE. THE CYBERMEN THEN GAINED ACCESS TO AND OVERWROTE THE EXECUTIVE LIBRARY ROUTINES IN THE COLLECTIVE'S CORE MEMORY. AS A RESULT, THE BORG HAVE BEEN STRIPPED OF MOST HIGHER FUNCTIONS AND ALL DECISION-MAKING FUNCTIONALITY.

"THE COLLECTIVE IS CURRENTLY RENDERED MOSTLY INERT. THE CYBER-CONTROLLER HAS SECURELY LOCKED DOWN THE COLLECTIVE THROUGH THE NETWORK NEXUS ON HIS SHIP."

HOW *DEVIOUS*. JUST LIKE THE CYBERMEN TO DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

NOW THE CYBERMEN RACE TOWARD THE BORG HOMEWORLD TO PERMANENTLY CONVERT THE COLLECTIVE TO THEIR WILL. FROM THE HOMEWORLD, THE CYBER-CONTROLLER WILL BE ABLE TO COMPLETELY FINALIZE THE CONVERSION OF THE RESOURCES, NETWORKS, AND DRONE POPULATION OF THE ENTIRE COLLECTIVE.

THE BORG WILL CEASE TO EXIST, AND THE CYBERMEN WILL BE TRIUMPHANT.

THE CYBERMEN WERE CONVINCED THAT IF THEY CAN COMPLETE THIS TASK BEFORE THE TIME LORD REALIZES WHAT THEY HAVE IN MIND, THERE WILL BE NO STOPPING THEM.

THEY MAY WELL BE RIGHT ABOUT THAT. THEY'VE MASKED THEIR STEPS SO WELL THAT I HAVE BEEN ALL ALONG A STEP BEHIND THEM.

AND THE CYBERMEN WITH THE FULL RESOURCES OF THE BORG COLLECTIVE MAY WELL BE INSURMOUNTABLE.

A QUESTION, CONDUIT. HOW ARE YOU YOURSELF FUNCTIONING WITHOUT THOSE EXECUTIVE ROUTINES?

I OPERATE AS THE CONDUIT ONLY AS A FINAL DESPERATE EFFORT ON THE PART OF A SPLINTER GROUP FROM THE COLLECTIVE, UNDETECTED BY THE CYBERMEN, TO PIECE TOGETHER AND ROUTE SOME SPARE DECISION-MAKING AND INITIATIVE ROUTINES FROM NON-ESSENTIAL PARTS OF THE COLLECTIVE'S NETWORK.

THESE RESOURCES ARE DWINDLING, HOWEVER, AND MY TIME REMAINING FOR INDEPENDENT ACTION AND INITIATIVE IS CERTAINLY LIMITED.

CAN YOU NOT RECOVER THE BORG EXECUTIVE LIBRARY FROM AN ARCHIVE OR PROTECTED BACKUP?
THE CYBERMEN WERE EXTREMELY THOROUGH IN THEIR EFFORTS. THEY HAVE SYSTEMATICALLY DESTROYED EVERY VERSION OF THE EXECUTIVE LIBRARY. PERHAPS THE TIME LORD CAN HELP WITH THIS.
PERHAPS, INDEED.

WE NEED TO CATCH UP WITH THE CYBER- CONTROLLER'S SHIP, FREE THE BORG FROM CYBERMAN CONTROL BY RESTORING THEIR EXECUTIVE LIBRARY, AND STOP THE CYBERMEN FROM REACHING THE BORG HOMEWORLD.
ALL WELL AND GOOD, DOCTOR, BUT WHERE EXACTLY ARE YOU GOING TO FIND A PRISTINE COPY OF THE BORG EXECUTIVE LIBRARY?

WE OFFER OUR ASSISTANCE IN ALL THE WAYS THAT ARE AVAILABLE TO US. IT IS TO YOUR BENEFIT AS WELL AS OURS THAT THE BORG COLLECTIVE BE FREED FROM CYBERMEN CONTROL.
I THINK I SEE WHAT YOU'RE GETTING AT. CAPTAIN PICARD, I THINK I SEE OUR PLAN.
TELL ME, CAPTAIN, DOES STARFLEET HAVE ANY RECORDS OF SPECIFIC BORG COORDINATES IN THE PAST? SPECIFIC PLACES WHERE WE KNOW A BORG VESSEL WAS AT A GIVEN TIME?
EXACT COORDINATES? UNFORTUNATELY, YES.
THE BATTLE OF WOLF 359. THE PLACE WHERE THE FEDERATION LOST 39 STARSHIPS.
ELEVEN THOUSAND STARFLEET OFFICERS MURDERED.
BAD WOLF. YET AGAIN...

I BEG YOUR PARDON?
NOTHING, CAPTAIN. MERELY ECHOES OF PAST LOSSES.

ALL RIGHT THEN, WE HAVE A PLAN TO HELP OUT OUR BORG FRIEND HERE, BUT WE STILL NEED TO FIGURE OUT SOME OTHER THINGS.
HOW ARE WE GOING TO CATCH UP WITH THE CYBER-CONTROLLER'S SHIP? THEY HAVE QUITE A LEAD ON US.

OUR WEAPONS WILL BE NO MATCH FOR THAT SHIP'S. AND IT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE THE NOTORIOUSLY EFFECTIVE BORG SHIELDS.
YOUR CHIEF ENGINEER WILL ALSO BE PROVIDED WITH INFORMATION THAT WILL ENABLE YOUR WEAPONS TO BE EFFECTIVE AGAINST BORG SHIELDS.
THERE WE GO, CAPTAIN— IT SEEMS OUR NEW PARTNER IS FULL OF IDEAS. THE CONDUIT IS MAKING A FULL CONTRIBUTION TO THIS COOPERATIVE ENDEAVOR.

YOUR VESSEL'S ENGINES ARE INEFFICIENT. BORG KNOWLEDGE CAN ENSURE THAT WE CAN CATCH UP WITH IT.
WE'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO OUR CHIEF ENGINEER. THIS WILL BE AN INTERESTING PARTNERSHIP FOR GEORDI, TO SAY THE LEAST.
HE'LL ALSO MAKE SURE THAT ANY OF YOUR "IMPROVEMENTS" DON'T HAVE ANY HIDDEN SURPRISES.

I AM CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC. THERE'S ONE MORE THING THAT CONCERNS ME. THE CONDUIT MAY HELP US MAKE SURE WE CAN DEFEND AGAINST THE BORG TECHNOLOGY, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE CYBERMEN THEMSELVES?
THEY'RE VULNERABLE TO GOLD, CAPTAIN, BUT WE WILL NEED A LOT OF IT. EVEN YOUR REPLICATORS MIGHT NOT BE ENOUGH—
I HAVE AN IDEA.

NAIA VII.

VRMMMMMMMMMMMMM

MAGNIFICENT! WHAT A SIGHT! NO WONDER YOU COME HERE SO OFTEN!

THIS IS NOT A LEISURE STOP, DOCTOR; OUR BUSINESS HERE IS DUE TO... ONGOING DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES.

WELL, REGARDLESS, IT'S QUITE A SIGHT TO SEE. SIMPLY MARVELOUS.

FORTUITOUS THAT THIS HAD BEEN OUR PREVIOUS STOP BEFORE ALL THIS BEGAN. LUCK WAS ON OUR SIDE; SOMETHING WE HAVE HAD PRECIOUS LITTLE OF. TIME IS AT A PREMIUM RIGHT NOW.

I INDICATED OUR URGENCY TO THE COMMANDER, CAPTAIN; SOMEONE SHOULD BE HERE ANY MOMENT.

WELL, WE HAVE A VERY SMALL AMOUNT IN OUR STORAGE FACILITY, BUT NOTHING YOU COULD NOT REPLICATE YOURSELF... I TAKE IT YOU NEED MUCH MORE THAN THAT?

OH YES. MUCH, MUCH MORE, LIEUTENANT.

RIGHT. THIS IS WHAT I EXPECTED, LIEUTENANT. WOULD YOU SUMMON THEIR LEADER FOR ME? I BELIEVE IT WAS SEELOS THAT I SPOKE WITH EARLIER.
CERTAINLY, CAPTAIN.

DO THEY TAKE LONG TO RESPOND? WE ARE PRESSED FOR TIME.
NO, NOT AT ALL, IN FACT. THEY SEEM TO KNOW WHEN SOMEONE HAS TRANSPORTED DOWN, AND WILL OFTEN COME BY TO INVESTIGATE OR MAKE GREETINGS. OFTEN I'M SURPRISED AT HOW QUICKLY THEY—

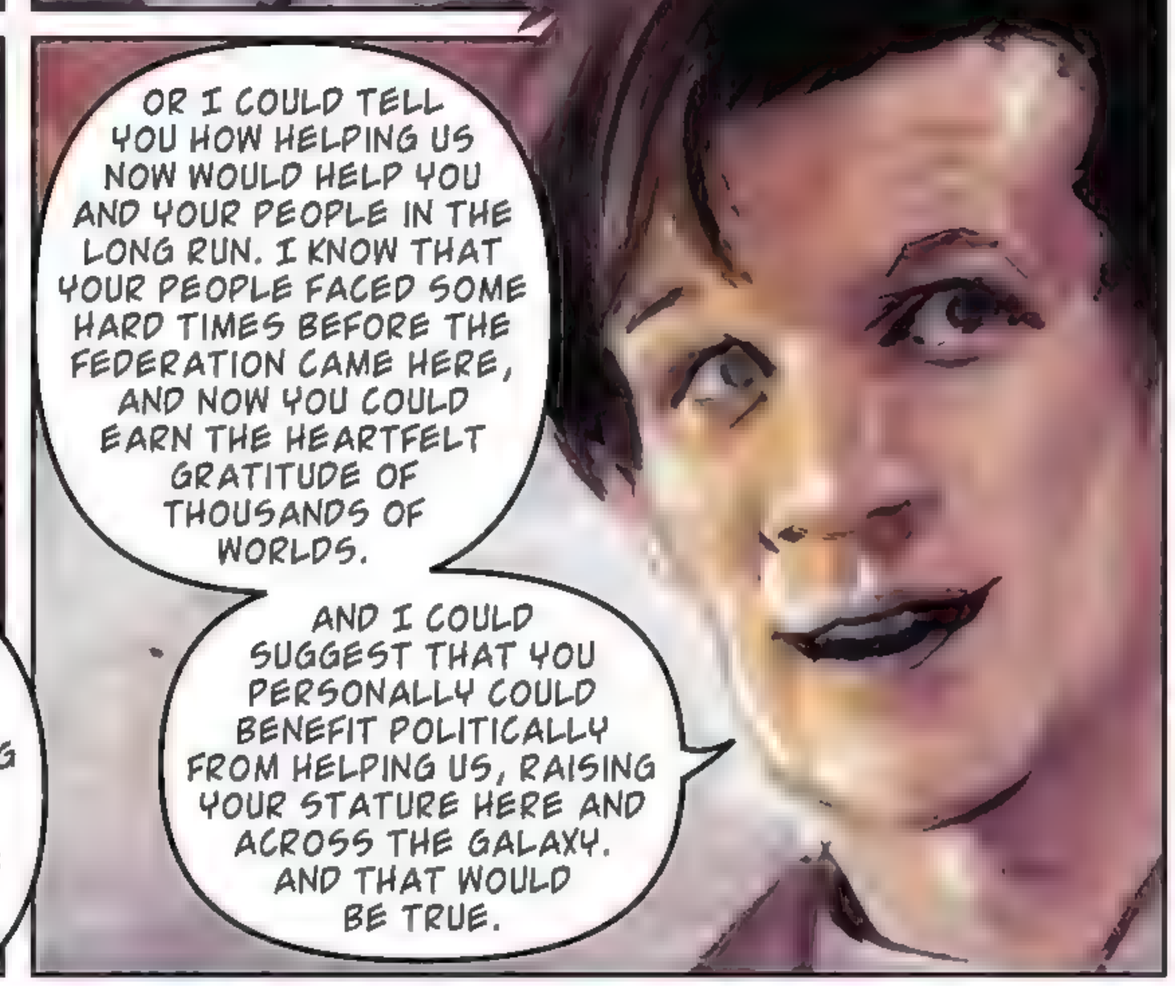
HELLO AGAIN, CAPTAIN.

IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN. PLEASE LET ME INTRODUCE TO YOU MY SHIP'S COUNSELOR, DEANNA TROI, AND OUR COMPANION, THE DOCTOR.
SEELOS, I'VE COME TO ASK A FAVOR OF YOU...

CAPTAIN, I CAN SCARCELY BELIEVE WHAT YOU'RE ASKING OF MY PEOPLE. YOU UNDERSTAND THAT THE MONETARY SYSTEM OF MY PEOPLE IS ENTIRELY LINKED TO A GOLD STANDARD, DO YOU NOT? DO YOU REALIZE THE HARDSHIPS THIS WOULD CREATE? THE POTENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC CATASTROPHE?
WE DO, SEELOS. WE WOULD NEVER ASK SOMETHING LIKE THIS IF THE CAUSE WERE NOT SO IMPORTANT. AND THE STAKES SO HIGH.

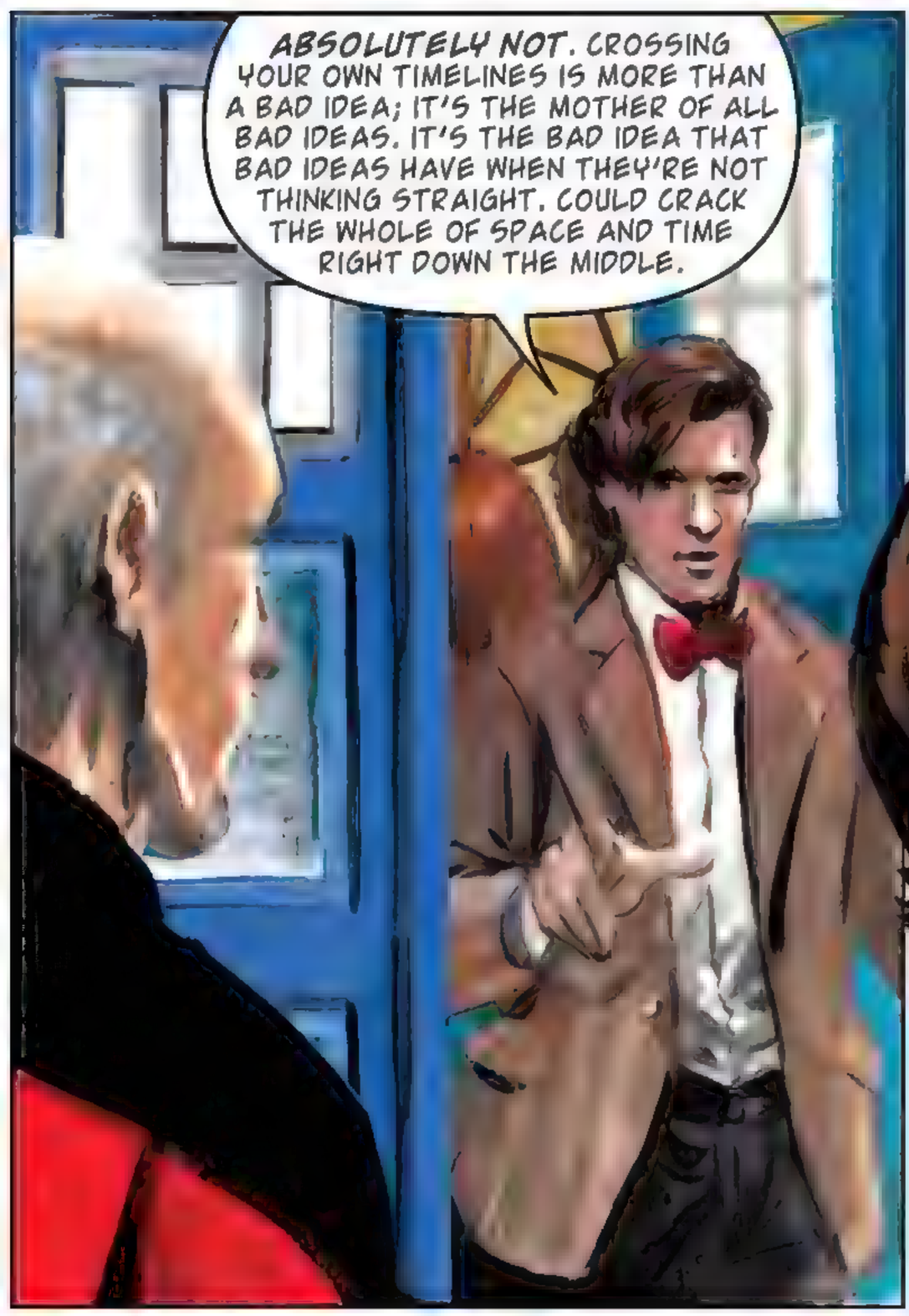
MY PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY PROVIDED THE FEDERATION WITH SO MANY RESOURCES FROM OUR PLANET, CAPTAIN. AND WHILE I VERY MUCH APPRECIATE THE POTENTIAL THREAT YOU HAVE DESCRIBED TO ME, I DON'T SEE HOW I CAN POSSIBLY ASK MY PEOPLE TO MAKE THIS SORT OF SACRIFICE.
SEELOS, WE WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO COMPENSATE YOUR PEOPLE FOR—

SEELOS, I THINK I UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION YOU'RE IN HERE. YOURS IS A SMALL SOCIETY COMPARED TO THE FEDERATION, AND YOU DID NOT AGREE TO THIS INITIAL ALLIANCE LIGHTLY, IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN.
I COULD TELL YOU THAT YOU SHOULD HELP US FOR STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE. I COULD EXPLAIN TO YOU HOW HELPING US NOW WOULD GIVE YOU ENORMOUS LEVERAGE IN FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE FEDERATION. AND THAT WOULD BE TRUE.

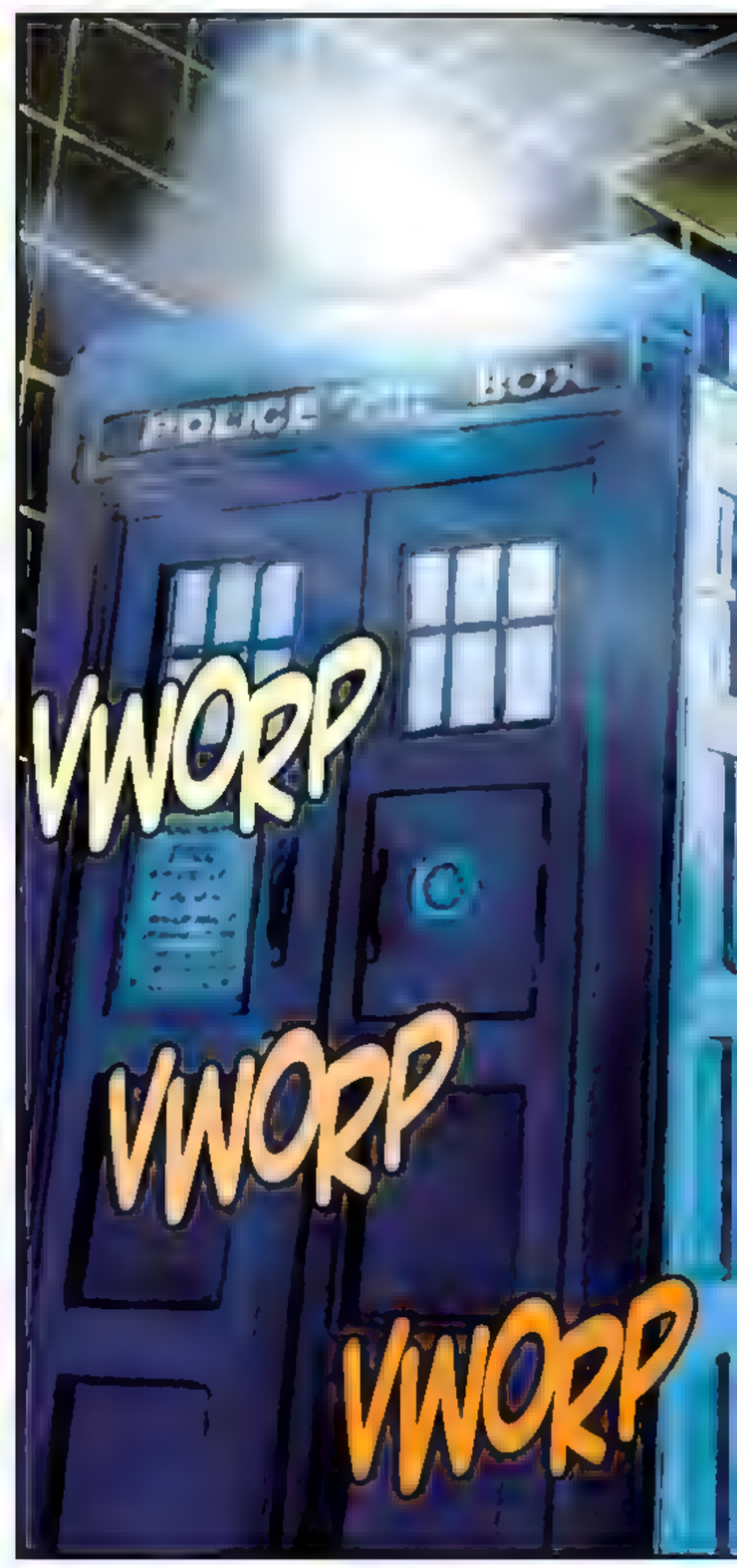

OR I COULD TELL YOU HOW HELPING US NOW WOULD HELP YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE IN THE LONG RUN. I KNOW THAT YOUR PEOPLE FACED SOME HARD TIMES BEFORE THE FEDERATION CAME HERE, AND NOW YOU COULD EARN THE HEARTFELT GRATITUDE OF THOUSANDS OF WORLDS.
AND I COULD SUGGEST THAT YOU PERSONALLY COULD BENEFIT POLITICALLY FROM HELPING US, RAISING YOUR STATURE HERE AND ACROSS THE GALAXY. AND THAT WOULD BE TRUE.

OR I COULD TELL YOU THAT HELPING US WOULD ENSURE THE SAFETY OF BILLIONS ACROSS COUNTLESS WORLDS, BEINGS WHO OTHERWISE WOULD BE LOST OR ENSLAVED, CONVERTED INTO SOULLESS AUTOMATONS WITHOUT FREE WILL OR THE PROSPECT OF HAPPINESS.
AND THAT WOULD ALSO BE TRUE.
WHAT SAY YOU?

WE SHOULD ACCOMPANY YOU, DOCTOR.
AGREED. THE BATTLE OF WOLF 359 WAS A VOLATILE, BRUTAL ENCOUNTER, DOCTOR. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO BE FACING.


ABSOLUTELY NOT. CROSSING YOUR OWN TIMELINES IS MORE THAN A BAD IDEA; IT'S THE MOTHER OF ALL BAD IDEAS. IT'S THE BAD IDEA THAT BAD IDEAS HAVE WHEN THEY'RE NOT THINKING STRAIGHT. COULD CRACK THE WHOLE OF SPACE AND TIME RIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE.

TRUST ME. BE RIGHT BACK.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TRUST HIM. DO YOU TRUST HIM YET, CAPTAIN?
HRM. WHAT CHOICE DO WE HAVE, NUMBER ONE?

WHAT IS IT, POND? I CAN FEEL THE EXPRESSION ON YOUR FACE. YOU'VE GOT THAT SCRUNCHED-UP "I-HAVE-A-BONE-TO-PICK-WITH-THE-DOCTOR-EVEN-THOUGH-IT-ALWAYS-TURNS-OUT-HE-KNOWS-WHAT-HE'S-DOING-AND-MAYBE-I-SHOULDN'T-BOTHER-HIM" EXPRESSION, HAVEN'T YOU?
YOU LIED TO CAPTAIN PICARD! THAT WHOLE BUSINESS ABOUT "NO CROSSING YOUR OWN TIMELINES," IT'S A LOAD OF RUBBISH!
YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT! YOU'VE DONE IT PLENTY OF TIMES! YOU EVEN ALLOWED THAT SARDICK CHARACTER TO MEET HIS YOUNGER SELF ON OUR HONEYMOON.
YES. A MINOR PREVARICATION, IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS.
IT'S JUST THAT, WHERE WE'LL BE GOING, THE THINGS WE MAY SEE... I THINK IT'S NOT THE SORT OF THING A MAN SHOULD HAVE TO LIVE THROUGH TWICE.

"ONCE WAS TRAGEDY ENOUGH."

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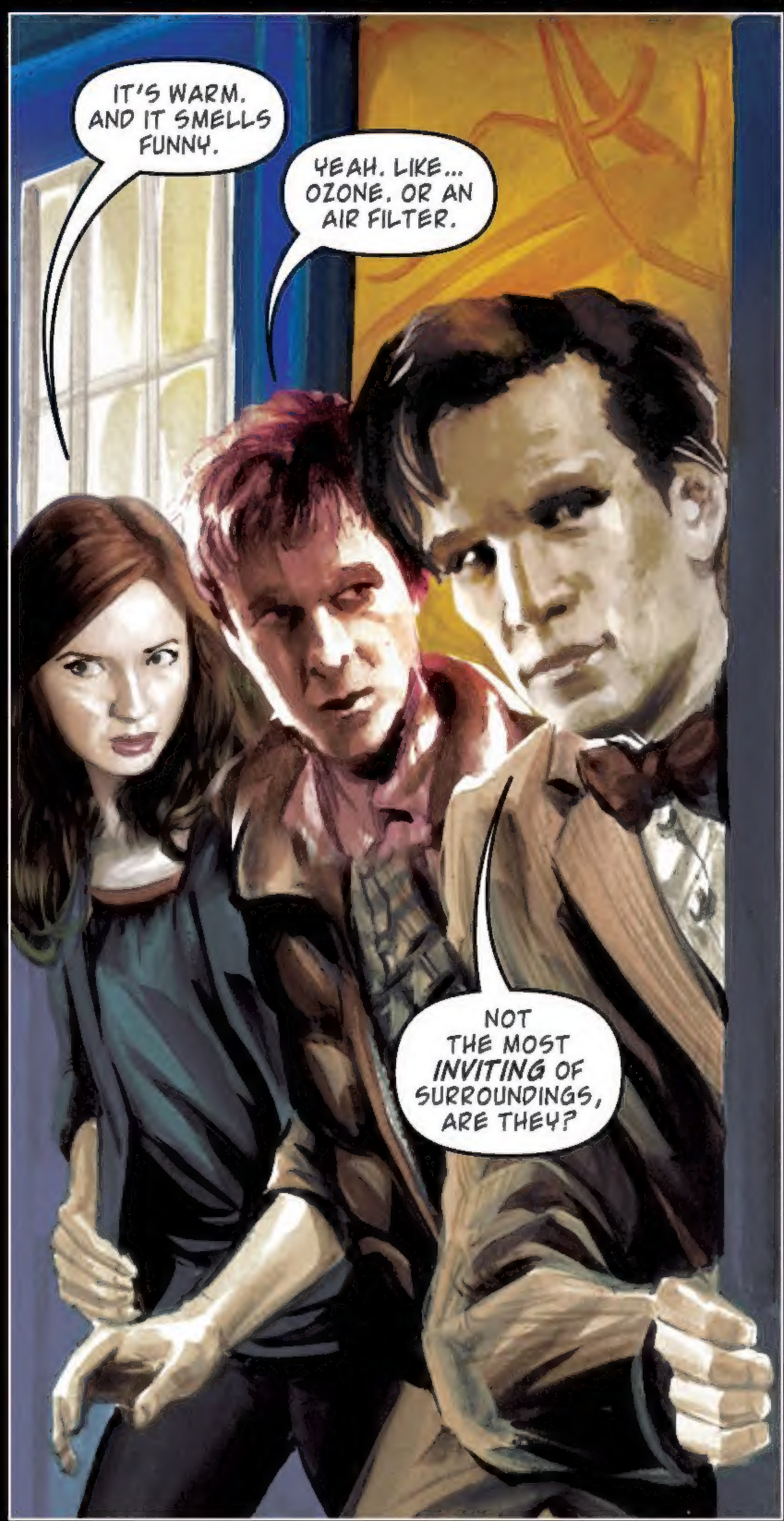

DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING?
OF COURSE I DO, POND. MOSTLY.

LUCKILY, THAT CHARMING ANDROID FELLOW GAVE ME ONE OF THESE TO HELP WITH THE DIRECTIONS. A LITTLE CLUNKY, BUT RELIABLE. THE TRICORDER, THAT IS, NOT THE ANDROID. ALTHOUGH HE ALSO SEEMS VERY RELIABLE, COME TO THINK OF IT.

AAACK!

AMY!

RELAX, AMY!

IT'S LIKE THEY DON'T EVEN REALIZE WE'RE HERE!
ALL RIGHT, THAT'S JUST CREEPY.

AS LONG AS WE DON'T INTERFERE WITH THEM, YES. WE'RE BENEATH THEIR NOTICE.

COME ALONG, PONDS! IF I'M READING THIS CORRECTLY, WE SHOULD BE GETTING CLOSE!

DOCTOR! TAKE A LOOK IN HERE!

IS THAT—?

IT CAN'T BE!

I'M AFRAID SO.

"IT'S CAPTAIN PICARD, HIMSELF ENSLAVED TO THE COLLECTIVE. I CAN IMAGINE NO WORSE A FATE. STILL, AS WITH THE OTHERS, SO LONG AS WE DON'T INTERFERE WITH HIS DUTIES DIRECTLY, WE SHOULD GO UNNOTICED."

OH DEAR.

TO BE CONTINUED!